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ABSTRACT

Graduation rates of mature age unmatriculated students who were admitted to the University of New South Wales were studied, along with employment outcomes for graduates. The study focused on the first five cohorts of special admissions students (1975-1979). The graduation rate of special admission mature age students compared favorably with that of students enrolling under normal provisions. Mature age special admission students performed as well as their younger peers, and some graduates have been very successful. The special admission scheme for mature age unmatriculated students was initiated in 1975, and the age of eligibility was set at 25, although it was later changed to 23. In 1985, a survey questioned graduates about their employment and their experiences both at the university and in seeking employment. Eighty percent of the sample were employed; only 3% were unemployed. Graduates generally had made considerable movement up the occupational scale, although a number of women were still employed at the clerical level. Additional survey findings are presented, including information on student characteristics; sources of support during college; reasons for college attendance; employment status before, during, and after college; and satisfaction with current job. (SW)

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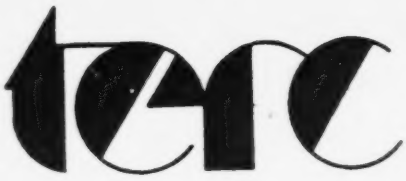

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MATURE AGE UNMATRICULATED STUDENTS - FINAL REPORT

A LOOK A GRADUATION RATES AND SUBSEQUENT EMPLOYMENT

Eve M. Barrett

June 1986

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RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT PAPER

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ABSTRACT

The University of New South Wales has been admitting mature age unmatriculated students since 1975. The first section of this report looks at graduation rates for the first five cohorts of these Special Admissions students and find that overall they have performed as well as their younger peers. Indeed some have been particularly successful. The second part summarises a survey carried out in 1985 which looked at the current employment situation of mature age graduates and asked them to comment about their experiences both at University and in seeking employment. Eighty percent of those surveyed are currently employed; only three percent report being unemployed. Graduates generally have made a considerable movement up the occupational scale although a number of women are still employed at the 'clerical' level. Only six respondents said they would not enrol if they had their time over again. However, ALL respondents would encourage other mature age persons to undertake university study.

Introduction

In 1974 the University of New South Wales introduced a Special Admissions Scheme which allowed unmatriculated persons aged 25 and over to enrol in certain courses. The following year 53 such students enrolled, mostly in the Faculty of Arts, with a few entering Law, Commerce and Social Work. The Tertiary Education Research Centre monitored the performance of this initial group to determine whether they were able to cope successfully with university study. We found that they performed most creditably, often achieving higher marks than their younger peers (Barrett, 1977). Since then the University has continued to admit unmatriculated students and by the beginning of 1984 some 1300 had enrolled under the Scheme. Initially an experiment, the Scheme is now a recognised method of entry although some of the original entry provisions have changed. For example, the age of eligibility is now 23 years not 25. Some students who enrolled in the early years of the Scheme would now be admitted under other provisions e.g. nurses who have completed a full three-year training programme. More than ten years have elapsed since the first students enrolled and, given the current debate about fees and Government concern about the effect on school leavers of the increasing number of mature age students, it seems appropriate to evaluate some of the outcomes of this Special Scheme. To what extent has the high level of performance of the first intake been maintained? How do graduation rates for mature age students compare with those of students who enrol under normal provisions? What proportion of mature age graduates are in employment? What were their experiences in seeking employment? Do they consider the years spent at the University to have been worth the sacrifices made, the worries and tensions encountered, in a return to study?

This report will be in two parts: the first part will look briefly at graduation rates for the first five cohorts enrolled under the Scheme and comment on the implications of these for subsequent cohorts; the second part will discuss the findings of a 1985 survey which asked graduates about their employment and how this had been affected by their initial decision to enrol at this University. This report should provide pertinent information on which the University can base subsequent decisions as to whether such Schemes should be continued, expanded or phased out.

Graduation Rates

The information given in this section has been derived from both student and alumni records. Several students from these five cohorts are still continuing their studies hence final graduation rates are expected to be higher. In addition some who discontinued may subsequently have enrolled at other tertiary institutions. There is always a small proportion of students who change institution before graduating and this is more likely for unmatriculated mature age students than for students enrolled under normal provisions. There are two main reasons for this. First, these students were unmatriculated on entry and were not eligible to enrol at institutions with different provisions for mature age students. However on completion of a successful first year at UNSW they then were able to enrol elsewhere. For them the University of New South Wales was not necessarily their first choice of institution - initially it was their only choice. Second, discontinuing students were likely to be successful students - many achieving a number of graded passes. This success gave them the opportunity to transfer both to other courses and institutions. Table 1 summarises the first five cohorts of mature age unmatriculated students from 'offers made' through to graduation.

The table shows that during the five years 1975-1979 the University offered a total of 716 places to students enrolling under the Special Scheme. Some 200 fewer completed enrolment. Research carried out in 1976 and 1977 showed that some of these 'non-enrollers' were also sitting for a Reduced HSC and on successful completion of this examination enrolled in other institutions. Some decided that other commitments precluded their enrolment at that time but stated an intention of returning to study later. (See Barrett, 1978, 1979). Some discontinued without failure before 30th April in the year of enrolment and are therefore not included in graduation rates. Sixty-five percent of the students admitted enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, the next largest enrolment being Commerce (14%). A larger enrolment in Commerce in 1978 and 1979 is one reason for lower graduation rates for these two cohorts (see below). The final column gives the graduation rate for 53 students who enrolled in 1976 after completing a Reduced HSC prescription (that is five units in the HSC

Table 1 MATURE AGE UNMATRICULATED STUDENTS (1975-1979) - STATISTICS SUMMARY (as at May 1985)

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	Total	Reduced HSC 1976
Offers made	68	71	205	165	207	716	-
Completed enrolment	53	60	147	125	140	525	-
Discontinued before 30th April	2	1	11	12	15	41	-
Baseline for calculation of graduation rates	51	59	136	113	125	484	53
DWOF/Did not re-enrol	7	14	26	26	24	98	9
DWF/Excluded	9	12	25	25	40	111	11
Still enrolled	-	-	3	8	9	20	-
Graduated	35	33	82	54	52	256	32
Graduation rate (%)	68.6	55.9	60.3	47.8	41.6	52.9	60.4

examination). These are students whose first year performance was reported in an earlier publication. (Barrett & Powell, 1980).

The 1975 cohort

This first cohort of mature age unmatriculated students was selected on the basis of a written application which, in addition to supplying biographical information, detailed why they wanted to enrol in the University and why they had been unable initially to continue their secondary education. Three members of the Admissions Committtee read all the applications, admitting those applicants who appeared to be motivated, educationally disadvantaged, and likely to succeed. The graduation rate for these first students is particularly satisfactory and compares favourably with graduation rates for students enrolling under normal provisions (AVCC & DES, 1971; Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training, 1979). Twenty students gained pass degrees, eight were awarded Honours (three Hons. I and five Hons. 2(1)), seven took second degrees or diplomas. Two transferred at the end of first year to other universities and both subsequently graduated. (They are, however, not included in the graduation rates which refer only to graduation at the University of NSW). The level of performance of these students was certainly superior overall to that of the normal intake. Some of the pass degree students would also have been eligible to enrol in Honours had they wished to.

The 1976 Cohort

The second intake is unique. This was the first year in which the University selected students by the current method (see Barrett and Powell, 1980) but because the Scheme was new and the advertising somewhat restricted the number of applicants for enrolment in 1976 was small. All those who 'negotiated' the several stages of the special admissions procedure were offered a place and so it is possible that some students who gained a place that year might not have been admitted in subsequent years. Although the graduation rate for this cohort is lower some interesting comments can be made about the students. Seven Arts students who completed first year did not re-enrol in 1977. Their 1976 examination averages ranged from a low of 66% to a high of 79%. Overall the average marks for the 14 'discontinuing/did not re-enrol' students ranged from a low of 58% to

79%. Certainly they were not typical of 'drop-outs' and as suggested earlier they may since have completed their studies elsewhere. Only two students were excluded. Most of those who discontinued with failure had a number of graded passes on their academic record and may have failed to notify their intention to discontinue by the stipulated date. They would have been eligible to re-enrol.

As with the 1975 cohort there were some extremely successful students in this cohort: four Arts students transferred at the end of first year to the Faculty of Law. One of these is now a barrister and the other three are practising solicitors. Comparison with the graduation rate for the 53 students who were admitted in 1976 on the basis of a Reduced HSC prescription shows that spending an extra year studying at the secondary level is not necessarily an advantage. Although not shown here examination results indicate this to be particularly so for students entering Arts, Law, and Social Work (Barrett & Powell, 1980).

The 1977 Cohort

Unlike the previous year the Scheme was well advertised and in mid 1976 some one thousand people turned up at the initial June meetings. With so many applications the University was unable to admit all those who satisfactorily completed the requirements of the Scheme. So it was decided to grade the open-book examination, which applicants had taken as part of the one-day induction-programme. This resulted in 205 offers being made and 147 students completing final enrolment. The graduation rate for this cohort to date is 60.3%, three students have still to complete their studies.

In some ways it was unfortunate that this element of competition was introduced as self-selection implies that criteria other than examination marks are related to subsequent success. Barrett & Powell (1980) show that performance in first year for these students was not related to grade awarded in the open-book examination. Table 2 gives graduation rates and discontinuation for this cohort by grade in that examination. The table shows that students with an 'A' grade have the highest graduation rate. However, students with a 'C' grade actually outperform those with a 'B'. It is noteworthy that in 1977 it had been intended originally to admit only applicants with either

Table 2 MATURE AGE UNMATRICULATED STUDENTS - 1977 COHORT
PERFORMANCE IN RELATION TO GRADE AWARDED IN OPEN-BOOK EXAMINATION

	Grade in open-book examination				
	A	B	C	Abs.*	
Students enrolled as at 30.4.77	37	52	41	6	136
Graduated (as at May 1985)	25	28	24	5	82
Discontinued	11	23	16	1	51
Still enrolled	1	1	1	-	3
% graduated	67.6	53.8	58.5		60.3

* Unable to attend Saturday induction course on religious grounds

an 'A' or 'B'. But as Table 2 shows had this been so 24 students who ultimately graduated would have been denied the opportunity.

The 1978 cohort

The number of Special Admission applications for 1978 declined by almost 50% compared to 1977. Why this was so is difficult to say. Some people may have been put off by the previous year's high rejection rate. In any event all but 19 of the applicants were offered a place. Forty did not take up that offer and a further 12 discontinued before 30th April, 1978. At that date 73 students were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and 40 in other courses, including 17 in Commerce. The graduation rate for the Arts students is similar to that of previous cohorts. However, by the end of first year only seven Commerce students had passed all subjects. As at May 1985 only five have graduated and one is still enrolled.

The 1979 cohort

Applications for 1979 increased again although not to the level of 1977. Two hundred and seven offers were made - 67 offers were not taken up and a further 15 enrolled only to discontinue before 30th April 1979. As in 1978 the number enrolling in Commerce increased - 28 completing enrolment with five discontinuing in April. Of the 23 still enrolled only two had graduated by May 1985 with three still enrolled. The graduation rate for Arts students, presuming the final three will graduate, will be 57%, somewhat less than previous years. The overall graduation rate for the 1979 cohort is further diminished because of a low Commerce graduation rate.

Some comments on graduation rates in relation to course studied

The previous data show that graduation rates for students in the Faculty of Arts are generally satisfactory. There has been some decline in 1978 and 1979 and there is evidence of more discontinuance as a result of failure. However, whether this is examination failure or failure to discontinue by the due date is uncertain. Graduation rates in Social Work and Law have been good, but then the numbers admitted have been far fewer than in Arts and applicants have sometimes also been interviewed. The numbers of students enrolling in Science has also been small and students

without a background in Mathematics have had difficulties. The first Science student admitted in 1975 completed four years part-time and then discontinued. Others have taken considerably longer than minimum time but ultimately have succeeded. It is, however, in the Faculty of Commerce where most problems have occurred. While students, often with a background in accounting, have coped well with Accounting subjects, they have been unable to cope with either Economics or Quantitative Methods. Looking back over the past ten years it is apparent that they should not have been admitted without an appropriate mathematics background. While their may have been well motivated this did not compensate for the lack of the normal mathematics prerequisite. Allowing them to repeat the same subject a number of times ultimately led to their discontinuance. Over the years 1975-1979, 70 students enrolled in Commerce. As at May 1985 only 17 had graduated and five were still enrolled. Whether or not those discontinuing gained anything from their time at University is difficult to ascertain. Certainly they must have endured considerable stress which could have been avoided had they either completed an appropriate bridging course or been advised to apply after completing HSC Mathematics.

General comments

At the end of 1975 we commented that the performance of the first cohort of unmatriculated students was, to say the least, highly commendable. The Scheme introduced the following year, following discussions with TERC staff and the Admissions Committee, was the first attempt by an Australian university to select mature age students using criteria other than the more usual examinations or achievement tests. Students in subsequent years have again demonstrated that the lack of full secondary education can be overcome given the necessary maturity, motivation and commitment to study. Graduation rates of the later cohorts are lower than the earlier years and, if graduation rates are taken as the measure of success, then perhaps one might argue that these students are now less successful than those selected by the normal procedures. However, as reported above, the performance of many discontinuing mature age students has been particularly good and given the many problems that confront them, family commitments, financial

responsibilities, etc. it is surely surprising that so many have persevered.

It has also been suggested by some staff that mature age students are no longer as motivated as they were - that they now 'play the system' to get into the University, in other words that the selection method is failing to achieve what it was initially set up to do. There may be some element of truth here but it is also an over-simplification. Some applicants who now gain a place may not be as highly motivated as students in earlier cohorts. Those applying in the early days had long wanted to enter University but had been denied the opportunity. Consequently they were determined to succeed. Most of those enrolling in both 1975 and 1976 had left school at 15 or 16. Recent enrollees on the other hand are more likely to have completed their secondary education but failed to reach the standard demanded by University entrance requirements. Obviously many factors are at work - for one, the employment situation is generally more difficult than it was ten years ago. There are also many more opportunities for mature age students to enrol in other institutions and it seems likely that some of those who discontinued have since completed tertiary studies elsewhere.

There are other possible reasons for the lower level of performance. When the first cohorts enrolled the number of unmatriculated mature age students in the University was small. Their impact on both staff and younger students was considerable - to staff they were a challenge, to young students they brought to the classroom the benefits of maturity and life experiences. Succeeding cohorts have resulted in a larger proportion of the student population now being 'mature age'. The novelty has worn off - staff may now see them as over-demanding of time - younger students see them as added competition in the battle for marks. It also seems possible that some mature age students may be failing because they enrol in too many subjects and are unaware of the options open to them, for example: taking 3 rather than 4 subjects in first year. Some of the most successful mature age Arts students in 1975 and 1976 were advised to take three subjects in first year so that they would become accustomed to being a student before taking on a heavier work load. Discussions with staff working with mature age students suggest that they no longer seem to be as supportive of one another.

In the early days they formed self-help groups and held special meetings. Whereas then they sought help from other mature age students or staff as soon as there were problems they now seem less likely to persevere and just disappear from the University. From personal experience I know that many of the early mature age students would have 'dropped-out' had it not been for the support of their peers and the help they received from the various university services.

The Employment of the Mature Age Graduates

Graduates from the first five cohorts of unmatriculated students were surveyed in the middle of 1985. Given the high rates of unemployment generally and the fact that older graduates were in competition with younger graduates we felt it was important to find out how many special admission students were in employment, at what level they were employed and how satisfied they were with their current employment situation. A questionnaire was designed to provide this sort of information and to give respondents an opportunity to comment on their experiences in seeking employment. We also asked them to tell us generally how they felt about their university experience .

In June we mailed 256 questionnaires to the graduates together with a reply paid envelope and a letter asking for their assistance. Eighty seven responded promptly and 21 questionnaires were returned to us "Address Unknown". We anticipated that there would be 'returns' as once students graduate they move to other cities or States and often leave no forwarding addresses. There is also the problem of contacting graduates who change their names. Student records provide information about graduation while the Alumni Association can provide current addresses for those graduates who continue to maintain contact with the University. However some students who had graduated could not be traced in the Alumni records. A second letter and questionnaire were mailed to two thirds of the non-respondents and this resulted in a further 31 responses. This is not an altogether satisfactory response rate and it would have been desirable to try to improve it. However time and resources did not permit this.(Note the author retired in June 1985). Nevertheless, the response rate is representative by year of enrolment, faculty and sex and the information provided by the respondents is of considerable general

interest and supports data available from other sources. (See for example McDonald, Knights, Everall, Quilty & Sansom, 1983).

Results

Student characteristics:

Just under three quarters of the respondents were female: 27% male. Most of the graduates had studied full-time : 17% enrolling part-time. However, many of the supposedly full-time students also held a full-time job. Part-time students were enrolled in either Law or Commerce and were mostly male. Most students graduated in the Faculty in which they were first enrolled. However, eight transferred from Arts to Law, three changed from professional faculties to Arts and one transferred from Social Work to Arts. Five students had also completed a Law degree subsequent to their Arts degree. So although the Faculty of Law took only small numbers of unmatriculated students each year others have completed their Law studies by subsequent enrolment in the Faculty.

Source of finance:

We asked graduates what had been their main source of support while studying. One fifth of the graduates said they had been employed full-time; 16% had been employed either part-time or casually; 36% had been in receipt of TEAS (including some who also worked casually) and 29% had been supported by their spouse/family. However in a subsequent question 24% said they had been in full-time paid employment 'during most of their enrolment' and 31% reported working either part-time or casually. That is some 50% had worked during their years at the University, a substantial proportion.

Employment Status:

Graduates were asked to give their employment status before enrolment, during enrolment and currently. Table 3 summarises their responses. The category 'other' includes persons who have retired or were employed in a voluntary capacity and , particularly under 'currently', those who are still enrolled in graduate courses. The table is particularly interesting as it shows that the unmeployment rate is low and that the proportion now engaged on full-time home duties has decreased.

Table 3 EMPLOYMENT STATUS (%)

	Before enrolment	During enrolment	Currently
Full-time employment	62	24	75
Part-time employment	9	18	10
Paid casual	4	13	1
Full-time home duties	16	20	3
Unemployed	5	22	3
Other	3	3	8

Type of employment:

We asked respondents what type of employment they were engaged in both before enrolling and currently. These were open questions and asked 'what sort of work were you doing/are you now doing?'. Responses were subsequently coded using the classification developed by Anderson, Boven, Fensham & Powell (1980). Table 4 summarises the responses from these two questions.

This table is particularly interesting as it demonstrates that the graduates have made a considerable movement up the occupational ladder. Prior to enrolling at the University almost half of them, the women in particular, had been working in clerical or sales positions. Those who had previously held semi-professional positions had been employed as nurses, accountants or librarians, holding the necessary sub-professional qualifications. Since graduating many have joined the ranks of the 'professions' with others upgrading earlier qualifications to now hold more senior positions in the 'semi- professions'. Eleven percent still work at the clerical/sales level - these are mostly women.

Table 4 TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT/OCCUPATION (%)

	Before enrolment	Currently
Professional	-	29
Semi-professional	13	21
Manager (large org.)	3	6
Manager (small business)	4	8
Intermediate	8	9
Sales/clerical	47	11
Skilled tradesman	7	1
Semi-skilled	7	-
Farmer	1	1
Housewife	7	3
Unemployed	1	1
Other	4	9*

* includes 6 graduates currently enrolled as full-time students and 3 who are retired.

Satisfaction with current job:

We asked graduates "How do you feel about this particular job?" Four fifths of those currently working were satisfied although there was some comment about the level of satisfaction, the most frequent being that the current job was seen as a stepping stone to something better - six respondents saying that the job had prospects. Five said they might change their job and four others were satisfied given the constraints under which they were currently operating. Those who said they were not satisfied still saw their job as a stepping stone to something better.

A further question "What sort of long term plans do you have for your career?" throws further light on the previous question. Twenty seven percent intend to continue in the same job; a further 21% hope to continue with the same career but in a more senior position; 19% have no long term plans so presumably they also intend to continue as at present; 11% say they intend to change their career and a further 4% are hoping for an academic/research position.

How Graduates see their degree affecting their employment:

Table 5 summarise the responses to a question asking graduates to agree/disagree with certain statements relating to the degree and their subsequent employment.

Table 5 THE DEGREE AND SUBSEQUENT EMPLOYMENT (%)

	Agree	Disagree	N/A
It helped me get a better job	68	11	21
It improved my chances of employment	52`	14	34
I am now overqualified for my present job	21	50	29
I am finding it difficult to get appropriate employment	20	26	54
It helped me get a more interesting job	66	15	19
I now have more responsibility	67	11	22

While it is somewhat difficult to account for the varying number of responses of 'not applicable' these may be respondents who either continued in the same job throughout their enrolment as students or who see the particular statement itself as irrelevant. The interesting responses on the positive side are the two-thirds or more who see the degree as enabling them to get better, more interesting jobs with added responsibility and the 52% who see it is improving their chances of employment. That 20% see themselves as now overqualified reflects the results of an earlier question on occupation which indicated that 11% were still employed at the clerical/sales level and 9% were classified as 'intermediate'.

Experiences in seeking employment:

Six percent are still working at the job they had while they were students. These include the part-time commerce students. Forty percent went straight into full-time jobs with another 12% working initially part-time: most of these are now employed full-time but five are still working part-time. Others said they were now employed but that it had been difficult at first. Comments about difficulties included lack of appropriate experience, being too old or not being able to find suitable jobs.

Change of career expectations:

Earlier we noted that a number of students had changed courses, particularly from Arts to Law. We asked graduates if they had changed their career expectations during their course of studies and if they had why was this so? Fifty percent said they had not changed their expectations - a figure certainly less than we would have anticipated. Fourteen said they had not initially been career oriented, 17 said that being a student had opened up alternatives and 11 said that their original degree had not been an adequate qualification for employment. Other comments related to becoming interested in particular subjects, finding they were better students than they had anticipated or not enjoying their initial course. However it is clear that the major reason for change of course is related to subsequent employment. Many mature age students, particularly women, enrolled at University initially for personal satisfaction. For a number of reasons, including age and lack of experience, they could not imagine themselves joining the professional workforce. However, by the end of first year, having achieved good marks, they begin to think about the possibility of a career. Additionally, of course, most unmatriculated students had little initial choice of course, Arts being the only option open to them. Responses to a further question substantiate this interpretation. (See below).

Reasons for enrolling as a student:

We presented graduates with a number of reasons for enrolling as a student and asked them to select the <u>most</u> important (A) and the next most important (B). Table 6 summarises these responses.

What is particularly interesting here is that 'personal satisfaction' ranks first although closely followed by a desire 'to obtain a change of vocation? Unfortunately the only pre-enrolment data we have about reasons for coming to University was gathered by the Admissions Section as part of the enrolment procedure. Given that applicants would anticipate possible selection being dependent on their responses, such responses are likely to have been biassed because of a desire to give the 'right response'. An analysis of the initial intake in 1975 showed non-vocational reasons as less important. Most

applicants, both male and female said they wanted to come to University to obtain formal qualifications for their present job or to obtain a change of vocation. However, one-third of the women stressed the need for 'personal development or fulfilment'.(Barrett, Cambourn & Oxborrow, 1975). A recent paper from Murdoch University discusses the employment of mature age students (McDonald et al, 1983) and finds graduates generally more career oriented with 72% of their respondents giving primarily career related responses. What is particularly interesting about the UNSW data is that responses to this question show no sex or age differences. Personal satisfaction ranks highest throughout.

Table 6 REASONS FOR ENROLLING(%)

	A	B
To upgrade or improve my existing qualifications	10	13
To obtain a change of vocation/qualify for a new job	39	21
Personal satisfaction	41	35
For other reasons of a personal nature not related to career	3	9
Interest in studying particular subjects	5	20

Achieving objectives:

Eighty two percent said they fully achieved their objectives in coming to University. Only five respondents, all women, were disappointed. A further 11% answered 'reasonably' and there were other responses such as 'still studying'. All in all it appears that coming to University had been a most worthwhile experience. This is further substantiated below.

Positive and negative experiences:

We asked graduates "Looking back over your years as a student what gave you most satisfaction?" Most respondents gave several positive responses and it was obvious from these responses that for most students coming to university had indeed been a most rewarding experience. On the assumption that the first comments made would be

of particular importance the first two comments were analysed and coded (further comments also being noted). The most frequent first response was the opportunity to learn, the mental stimulation involved, 'the broadening of knowledge over a wide variety of subjects', or as one student put it 'the expansion of my intellectual horizons'. Second in importance was the opportunity for interaction with academic staff and other students, both mature age and younger. Third was the achievement of long held ambitions such as the successful completion of the degree or even just an opportunity to come to university. Other positive experiences relate to the improvement of self concept, the recognition of latent abilities or just doing well. The following comments probably sum up the overall responses to this question.

> The warmth that came from acceptance of me as a peer by students more than half my age. The excitement of discovering wonderfully new ideas and perspectives I never dreamed existed. The pride in declaring "I go to Univ" when asked "what do you do?" The self-satisfaction (smugness?) in observing how attidues changed - suddenly I was seen by doctors, lawyers and indian chiefs as being worthy and even capable of sharing their secrets.

> I achieved personal satisfaction from my success and also from family approval of that success and secondly I found some of chosen subjects of great interest. At that stage I was not planning a career but fulfilling a cherished ambition which I had missed earlier in life.

> It's very hard to pick out individual experiences. The intellectual stimulation was exciting; finding that not only was I capable of completing the degree but completing it with good academic results was great for my self-esteem. It was also a highly significant political experience for me in that it gave me a framework for existing beliefs.

Analysing disappointments was much more difficult as the responses to this question were far more varied. As might be anticipated 'lack of time' was cited frequently - time for family commitments, time for study, time for friends and relaxation and time for both employment and study. The second most frequent disappointment was not doing as well as hoped - getting a distinction rather than a high distinction or missing out on 1st class Honours. Of course lack of time also is likely to affect the level of achievement. Mature age students interviewed in 1975 reported having to make a choice between passing four subjects or achieving graded passes in three. Other

respondents were disappointed with the standard of teaching. There were comments such as

> The somewhat narrow focus of some subject courses and the fact that a number of lecturers/tutors are not up to the cutting edge within their professed disciplines.

A somewhat more serious comment was made by another student.

> I was disappointed that often topics were only superficially addressed and that some lecturers came to class unprepared and didn't really seem interested in their students. In short there is quite a bit of dead wood in the University.

There was also concern about examiner biasses - students in one Faculty thought staff were biassed in favour of the school leavers and in another there was comment about having to appear to support the political beliefs of the staff member. As one student put it -

> The game was to quote other people and to pick essay topics suitable for the 'marker/lecturer'and to deny my own experience and thoughts.

Another student, however, thought that perhaps her disappointments might be related to her level of expectations.

> Most (disappointments) arise from an unrealistic and idealised vision of what uni. was like - I'd not known anyone who had been there. Tutors were no gurus and students did not cluster around the knees of Aristotelian lecturers who wanted to do nothing else with their lives but impart rare wisdom. Most were merely human, though 1 or 2 were barely so.

Enrolling as a mature age student:

We asked 'If you had your time over again would you enrol as a mature age student?' Only six respondents said 'No'. All the others were very positive about coming to University, despite the number of disappointments reported. Four of those who said 'no' were men - all with responsible positions, either in their own businesses or in occupations where a university degree is not necessary. One women had retired and is involved in continuing voluntary work. Nevertheless <u>all</u> six would advise other mature age applicants to enrol if they had the opportunity, but with some provisos. As one respondent put it

> The financial cost was very high and the effect on my social relationships was not good. I would point out the restrictions

and the cost and then I would recommend that the person enrol because overall the experience was very worthwhile.

Another, currently working as a systems analyst suggested that an enrolee must consider

> "Why do you want the degree? I finished because to others dropping out is worse than never starting. You must want it enough to go through the system".

A women in her thirties commented

> During the course I would have said 'No' because it was exhausting and I felt trapped because I couldn't give up what I had already achieved in previous years of the course and had to press on. Now that I am finished definitely YES!

Many of those who said 'yes' also point out the advantages of being mature age. Comments such as

> Definitely. In my view most students would gain more from being at University if they had time to gain work and life experience beforehand. How any young kid straight out of school can get anything out of sociology or psychology or social work I can't imagine.

> Yes, quite definitely. From a social point of view I probably didn't get as much as ordinary students but the maturity meant that I was clearer as to what I wanted out of courses and I think, therefore, that intellectually I gained more than most ordinary age students.

> Yes. I feel I gained more from the course as a mature age student than if I'd been doing it at 18 as one is more accessible and able to digest ideas without taking them as gospel.

So in response to a final question "What would you say to a mature age person thinking about enrolling at the University" ALL respondents said that they would encourage them to enrol. However, more than half the respondents added a note of caution.

> By all means go to it, but one must be disciplined and determined to go through with it. Also keep low key, there is nothing worse than a know-it-all mature-age over-achiever.

> Go ahead but be determined that once you start you are going to stay to the finish however tough it may seem at time. The positive aspects far outweigh any negatives and the rewards at the end are worth it.

Another comment sums it all up.

> Don't put it off - do it now! You'll be amazed at the levels you can achieve that you've never dreamed yourself capable of. You'll be exhilarated by a newly discovered ability and grow through a heightened awareness of self worth. You're much better than you now think you are and deserving of much better than you probably now receive. The more prepared you are for the dramatic changes which will almost certainly occur in your life, the more you will be able to use them to your advantage.

Some final thoughts:

If the comments of mature age graduates are any guide to success then the Special Admission Scheme has been successful. As Table 4 shows most are now working in higher status occupations than before enrolment and enjoy more responsibility. At the same time their time as students has been both enjoyable and rewarding. We do not know how many would have enrolled had there been tuition fees but given that over half received TEAS it seems likely that many would not have been able to enrol. Several students commented on both being admitted to university and the lack of fees.

> ..... I could never have done it had there been a fee structure.

> I'm so glad I had the opportunity - I'm profoundly grateful.

> Nobody in my family had ever been to university - let alone graduate. I applaud the government of Gough Whitlam for giving me the opportunity.

> The opportunity to study for a degree would not have been possible without this Scheme. I have dependent children and it has also dramatically affected their life style, their expectations and their future chances. Without a change in my career and income I would have found it difficult to pay for their tertiary education.

A final comment suggests that there is merit in such schemes being extended.

> I honestly believe that the State would save itself vast expenditure by actively encouraging mature age students. Far from a re-introduction of fees, it should be made easier for people to become mature age students. The feelings of uselessness and inadequacy which lead to mental and emotional problems and dependency on alcohol and tranquillizers can be avoided.

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